

Message Text

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ACONSUL MADRAS 1265
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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 3506

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, CE
SUBJECT: TAMIL UNITED LIBERATION FRONT NATIONAL CONVENTION

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: AT INVITATION OF TAMIL UNITED LIBERATION FRONT (TULF), EMBASSY OFFICER ATTENDED PARTY'S SECOND ANNUAL CONVENTION HELD IN JAFFNA JULY 29-30. THE CONVENTION, TIGHTLY ORGANIZED, AND WELL-ATTENDED, WENT SMOOTHLY WITH ONE MINOR DEMONSTRATION BY MILITANT TAMIL YOUTH DISSENTING FROM MODERATE CONCLUSION. END SUMMARY.

2. FIRST DAY SLOGANEERING

DURING THE FIRST DAY OF THE CONVENTION OF THE TULF EXECUTIVE AND GENERAL COMMITTEES MET IN CLOSED SESSION TO DRAFT AND DISCUSS RESOLUTIONS TO BE PRESENTED TO THE PARTY. SIMULTANEOUSLY, THE RANK AND FILE WERE TREATED TO WHAT WERE BILLED AS LITERARY, CULTURAL, AGRICULTURAL, YOUTH, AND
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WOMENS' CONFERENCES BUT WHICH WERE IN FACT A SERIES OF HYPERBOLIC POLITICAL SPEECHES. PRINCIPAL THEMES WERE THE HISTORY OF THE TAMIL PEOPLE, PAST SINHALESE GOVERNMENTS' INEQUITIES TOWARD THE TAMILS WHICH HAVE REDUCED THEM TO AN INFERIOR SLAVE CLASS, THE TAMIL PEOPLES' ASPIRATIONS FOR A SEPARATE TAMIL STATE, AND THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT'S ECONOMIC POLICIES THAT ARE RAISING THE COST OF LIVING AND

DESTROYING THE TAMIL FARMERS LIVELIHOOD BY ALLOWING THE FREE IMPORTS OF CHILLIES AND ONIONS, TRADITIONAL TAMIL AREA CROPS.

3. SECOND DAY VOTING

ON THE SECOND DAY, THE CONVENTION GOT DOWN TO BUSINESS. THE PARTY LEADERSHIP PRESENTED TWO RESOLUTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION BY APPROXIMATELY 500 DELEGATES FROM THE PARTY BRANCHES, INDICATING THAT THE RESOLUTIONS HAD BEEN UNANIMOUSLY PASSED BY THE GENERAL COMMITTEE. THE PLATFORM WAS THROWN OPEN TO DELEGATES TO EXPRESS THEIR OPINIONS AND THEY DID. AN UNCONTROVERSIAL RESOLUTION CALLED FOR EQUALITY OF LOWER CASTES TO ENTER ALL TEMPLES OR TO USE THE COMMON WELLS EVOKED NO REACTION.

4. MAIN QUESTION

A SECOND RESOLUTION STATING THAT THE TULF WILL CARRY ON THE STRUGGLE TO ESTABLISH A SEPARATE STATE IN TRADITIONAL TAMIL AREAS HAD ARDENT DEFENDERS AND OPPONENTS. OPPONENTS OBJECTED ON TWO COUNTS, SAYING THAT RESOLUTION SHOULD GEOGRAPHICALLY DELINEATE TRADITIONAL TAMIL AREAS AND SHOULD SPECIFY A DATE FOR ACHIEVING A SEPARATE STATE. THEY ALSO WANTED IMMEDIATE DRAFTING OF A TAMIL CONSTITUTION. DEFENDERS, PRIMARILY FROM THE EASTERN PRO-

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VINCES, ARGUED THAT RESOLUTION SHOULD BE LEFT VAGUE BECAUSE TAMILS IN EASTERN PROVINCES SURROUNDED BY SINHALESE WOULD HAVE TO BEAR BRUNT OF SINHALESE REACTION. INSTEAD OF PRECIPITATE ACTION, EASTERNERS ADVOCATED LONG-RANGE PREPARATION AND INVITED TAMIL YOUNG PEOPLE TO COLONIZE NEW LANDS BEING OPENED IN THE EASTERN PROVINCES TO HALT SINHALESE ENCROACHMENT AND STRENGTHEN NOW VULNERABLE TAMIL AREAS. TAMIL LEADERSHIP SAID THEY WOULD BE FIRST TO FIGHT AND DIE FOR A TAMIL SEPARATE STATE. HOWEVER, THEY ADVOCATED RESTRAINT, SAYING THE TIME IS NOT RIGHT AND MUCH PREPARATION IS NEEDED. WHEN PUT TO A VOTE, THERE WERE ONLY THREE DISSENTERS TO THE RESOLUTION AS DRAFTED.

5. MODERATE CONCLUSION

TULF CONVENTION CULMINATED IN GENERAL MEETING ATTENDED BY UPWARDS OF TWENTY-THOUSAND, MANY PROBABLY THERE ONLY FOR THE ENTERTAINMENT. AT THE GENERAL MEETING, THE TULF LEADERSHIP EXPLAINED THE RESOLUTIONS THAT HAD BEEN ADOPTED. THERE WAS OCCASIONAL CHEERING WHEN SPEAKERS MENTIONED THE NEED FOR A SEPARATE TAMIL STATE, BUT MOST PEOPLE SEEMED TO ACCEPT THE MODERATE RESOLUTIONS.

6. YOUTH DISSENTS

ONE SMALL YOUTH GROUP MARCHED TO THE CONVENTION GROUNDS IN A PROCESSION IN DEFIANCE OF THE GOVERNMENT'S BAN ON POLITICAL PROCESSIONS AND OF THE TULF LEADERSHIPS' ORDERS NOT TO MARCH. ALTHOUGH THERE WERE POLICE ALONG THE MARCH ROUTE, THEY DID NOT HINDER THE PROCESSION. THE YOUTHS DEMONSTRATED IN FRONT OF THE PLATFORM CHANTING FOR A SEPARATE STATE, BUT WERE QUICKLY SEPARATED AND POCKETED BY TULF ATTENDANTS AND VOLUNTEERS. AMIRTHA-LINGAM, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE TULF AND LEADER OF THE TULF, AND OTHERS CHASTIZED THE YOUTHS FOR ENDANGERING THE MOVEMENT AND THE TAMIL PEOPLE BY RISKING A POSSIBLE

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CONFRONTATION WITH THE POLICE AND THE GOVERNMENT. THROUGHOUT, THE WELL-DISCIPLINED CROWD REMAINED CALM AND EXCEPT FOR THE THROWING OF LEAFLETS BY TWO OR THREE DEMONSTRATORS LATER ON, THE YOUTHS WERE NOT HEARD FROM AGAIN.

7. COMMENT: IN DISCUSSIONS WITH TULF MP'S DURING THE CONVENTION, EMBASSY OFFICER WAS TOLD THAT RESOLUTION REGARDING SEPARATE STATE HAD BEEN CAREFULLY DRAFTED AND HEATEDLY DEBATED IN CLOSED SESSIONS. THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT IT WAS NOT UNANIMOUSLY ADOPTED. NONETHELESS IT WAS MEANT TO BE A TEMPORIZING STEP. AS SUCH IT FITS THE MODERATE TENOR OF MOST TAMIL THINKING ON THE SEPARATE STATE ISSUE. THEY ARE NOT READY TO GIVE UP THE IDEA OF A SEPARATE STATE, ALTHOUGH THEY REALIZE ACHIEVING IT WOULD BE AN IMPOSSIBLE UNDERTAKING THAT COULD DESTROY THE TAMILS, BUT THEY SEEM TO SEE IT AS A BARGAINING CHIP TO GAIN AS MANY CONCESSIONS FROM THE GOVERNMENT AS POSSIBLE.

8. THE FUTURE

ONE OF THE CONCESSIONS MOST OFTEN MENTIONED IS SOME DEGREE OF AUTONOMY FOR THE TAMIL AREAS, SUCH AS A FEDERAL ARRANGEMENT. HOWEVER, THE TAMILS MAY ACCEPT LESS THAN THAT. ONE PARTY MEMBER CLOSE TO AMIRTHA-LINGAM SAID THAT THE PRESIDENT HAS BEEN DISCUSSING WITH THE TULF LEADERSHIP THE POSSIBILITY OF DISTRICT MINISTERSHIPS FOR TULF MP'S IN TAMIL AREAS. HOWEVER, THE TULF STIPULATION IS THAT DISTRICT MINISTERS REMAIN THE OPPOSITION. IN THE COMPETITION FOR DISTRICT MINISTERSHIPS AND THE PRESTIGE AND PERQUISITES LIKELY TO GO WITH THEM, GOVERNMENT PARTY MP'S WITHOUT PORTFOLIOS MAY FIGHT TO RETAIN THE POSITIONS FOR THE GOVERNMENT.

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TOO, THERE IS AS YET NO CLEAR STATEMENT OF THE DUTIES
AND POWERS OF DISTRICT MINISTERS. ULTIMATELY THESE MAY
NOT BE SUFFICIENT TO GIVE THE SEMBLANCE OF AUTONOMY THE
TAMIL LEADERSHIP SEEKS AS A MEANS OF ASSUAGING THE MILITANTS
AND SATISFYING THE PRIDE OF THE MODERATES. NEVERTHELESS, THE
TULF SEEMS TO HAVE BOUGHT TIME TO EXPLORE THE DISTRICT
MINISTERSHIP CONCEPT OR OTHER COMPROMISES. A LEADING TAMIL
LAWYER HAS INDICATED THAT NEGOTIATIONS FOR COMPROMISES
ARE GOING ON QUIETLY OUTSIDE OF THE NATIONAL STATE
ASSEMBLY. WE BELIEVE HIM.
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